

Since the length of these vehicles can go up to 50 feet plus, they require large space for its movement and manoeuvre. Companies need to have at least 70 to 75 feet of free space in front of the docks at the hubs. Typically, this sort of operation needs two lakh to three lakh square feet of warehouses. Delhivery has heavily invested in warehouses and hubs that can support this sort of tractor trailer operations.

The express logistics industry is largely driven by high volume loads--goods that are of high value, fragile in nature and requiring faster, time-bound deliveries. Most express companies don't find a pure value add in terms of using tractor trailers. "The cost economics also doesn't make sense for express companies. The running cost of single-axle trucks is around INR32 per kilometre and INR44- INR45 for multi-axle trucks. Typically, for tractor-trailers, running cost is around INR50 to INR55 per kilometre," says Jasveer Singh, CEO at Gurgaon-based Instant Transport Solutions, one of the vendors working dedicatedly with Delhivery.

Nevertheless, in the last one year, the industry has seen a significant jump in tractor trailer adoption, according to experts mainly as highways have become more wider due to the government's infrastructure push.

Also, post GST implementation, **truck** movements have become more seamless and efficient as states have abolished border check posts.

Tractor trailers can carry more load. "One 40-foot trailer, which can carry a maximum of 50 (tonnes) to 55 tonnes, can load an equivalent of two 32-foot trucks. Companies are thus looking to save on freight costs by up to 20% to 25% using trailers," says Ambuj Choudhary, Head of Service Delivery at DP World. "Lesser trucks on the road also reduce carbon emissions," Choudhary says.

Recently, VRL Logistics, one of the country's largest fleet owners of commercial vehicles, placed an order for 1,500 trucks with Ashok Leyland, out of which 100 are tractor trailers.

Design and Development may spur adoption

The quality of trucks from various OEMs like Volvo Trucks, Tata, Ashok Leyland has also undergone a sea change. Modern BS-VI compliant tractor trailers are much better in terms of uptime and have not reported high incidence of breakdowns apart from having excellent safety features.

“Earlier changing engine oil and service intervals was below 20,000 kilometres, now it is an average of more than a lakh kilometres across original equipment manufacturers (OEMs),” says Deepak Thacker, founder of Gujarat Logistics, which owns a fleet of 306 tractor trailers, deployed for transportation of export import cargo.

OEMs have also improved on features such as sound proofing of cabins for better driver comfort, minimising driving fatigue.

Now, these machines are more about technology and less about mechanics. These telematics-driven machines can enable preventive maintenance. "Earlier a mechanic could touch the vehicle and get it repaired. Now with Euro 6 norms kicking in, these telematics-driven trucks can give you all the data on all the parts of the truck— say the clutch plate will go away in the next 5,000 kilometres," says Jasveer Singh of Instant Transport.

Tractor trailers have evolved in terms of design and development, a shift from the earlier line of thinking . when tractor trailers were made by manufacturers as per the requirement of specific industries like steel, cement, and pipes. Now, these machines carry all sorts of cargo loads.

It is to be noted that while large OEMs like Volvo, Ashok Leyland, Mahindra and Eischer and Bharat Benz, manufacture tractors, there is a separate set of companies making trailers. These include Tata DLT, Satrac Engineering and Seamless Autotech.